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ABSTRACT

Locative inversion, one aspect of word order in English discourse in which the positions of verb and noun phrase are inverted (e.g., "in front of the house is a tree"), is examined. It is argued that inversions after deictic adverbs and those after non-deictic, locative constituents are related, both representing devices: (1) expressing point of view in discourse and establishing a particular perspective of the speaker, and (2) serving to organize the discourse. On one hand, inversions can temporarily add a perspective of immediacy to the description of an actual scene or event, thereby setting apart the reproduction of this scene from another functional part of the event. Alternatively, when the immediacy produced is from within the author's own discourse organization, inversions help signal that the author provides topical orientation or an evaluation. Contains 17 references. (MSE)

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Viewpoint and the organisation of informative discourse: on the discourse function of full inversion in English

1. Introduction

Within the English word order system, where the position of the noun phrase before the verb is interpreted as marking the grammatical subject, only a limited range of reordering options are available to the choice of the speaker. One of these options for deviant ordering of major sentence constituents is inversion, in which "the NP of which some location, status, or activity is being predicated (the logical subject) appears to the right of the verb; [and] some other constituent appears to the left of the verb, where the subject would canonically appear" (Birner 1994:234). Two examples of only a sub-set of possible VS-constructions in English are (1) and (2):

(1) *Here is the paper I promised you last week.*
(2) *In front of the house is a tree.*

While an inversion such as (1) may pass almost unnoticed, (2) has a stronger flavour of reordering and in fact becomes fully acceptable only when given an adequate context. This particular full verb inversion type is usually referred to as *locative inversion* (Bresnan 1994), a notion that tends to exclude constructions such as (1). However, since *locative* implies a basic operation of locating discourse entities mentally or conceptually, one can in principle extend this analysis to full inversion following deictic adverbs such as *here* as well: in both cases, entities are introduced into the discourse which, by way of the inversion, come to carry the sentence focus (Enkvist 1980) and potentially become the new focus of attention in discourse (Vallduví 1992). I shall therefore explicitly argue here that inversions after deictic adverbs and those after non-deictic, locative constituents are very much related in kind. Both are regarded in this paper as devices of expressing point of view in discourse, and of thereby

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establishing a particular perspective which the speaker assumes. It is through directing the focus of attention along discourse entities that full inversion can furthermore contribute to the organisation of a discourse.

This analysis does not in principle contradict most previous claims made about the discourse function of full inversion in English, in particular not an information-packaging analysis of it (Birner 1992, 1994). However, the approach taken here adds a component of meaning involved that is apt to account for what are so far apparent imponderables about the usage of inversion in naturally-occurring discourse: although it has been plausibly argued that inversion reflects a preference for "presenting information which is more familiar in the discourse before information which is less familiar" (Birner 1994:255) or serves an overall "presentative function" (Rochemont 1986, Langacker 1993), less attention has been paid to the fact that in many types or sub-parts of a discourse one basically finds no occurrences of inversion at all, while in others occur virtual clusters. By analysing inverted constructions as expressing a point of view in discourse, one can make some predictions about the discourse conditions under which inversions are more likely to be used.

More complex contributions of inversion to the organisation of a discourse depend, in fact, on their relative unexpectedness, rather than on a high probability or density of occurrence, so that their status within a discourse is not necessarily everywhere the same. (3), for instance, is a passage from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, containing the only two inversions that are to be found in the whole of the novel's first chapter. Beyond the function of full inversion to establish a certain viewpoint from where the scene is looked upon, these instances of inversion present the two most prominent discourse entities in that context, and thus also have a relevance for the topical organisation of the chapter:

(3) *The dim roar of London was like the bourdon note of a distant organ.*
In the centre of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary beauty, and in front of it, some little distance away, was sitting the artist himself, Basil Hallward, whose sudden appearance some years ago caused, at the time, such public excitement, and gave rise to so many strange conjectures. (Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p.7)

It will be shown below that due to this twofold discourse function of establishing a viewpoint and supporting the organisation of a discourse, the occurrence of an inversion often contributes to the way in which informative texts are structured into various topical or functional sub-parts.

2. Viewpoint and subjectivity in lexical locative inversion

As argued in Drubig (1988), there is a clear interrelationship between inversions after *here* (and *there*, if stressed), i.e. following a deictic adverb pointing to a shared perceptual field, and inversions following more complex (= lexical) fronted constituents. The former type he calls the "deictic type of SVI [= subject verb inversion]", while non-deictic constituents are followed by a "lexical type" of inversion:

> [They] can be said to be complementary in distribution and discourse function: deictic SVI is used in a situation of optimal perceptual access ..., where pointing is possible, whereas lexical SVI typically occurs in non-optimal situations characterized by the relative distance or displacement of one speech act participant ... from the region of optimal perceptual access. (ibid: 91)

As can be assumed on the basis of Birner's (1992, 1994) findings about the relative discourse-familiarity of the constituents affected by an inversion on the one hand, and of the kind of verbs involved ("informationally light", in particular copular *be* or verbs of appearance and existence; cf. Birner 1992:191ff.) on the other, both types of construction can indeed be said to be **presentative** in kind: They consist of a scene-setting process and then direct the subsequent focus of attention to a discourse entity or topic newly or re-introduced. But while in inversion following deictic adverbs reference is made to a shared perceptual field, in lexical inversion the starting-point of the

presentative mechanism is explicit lexical material, i.e. the addressee is provided "with all the lexical information necessary to construct a mental model of the reference situation" (Drubig 1988:91). This is thus a process which relies on **conceptualisation**, as opposed to the **perceptually** accessible situation to which deictics refer. Drubig concludes that

> the function of lexical SVI appears to be the inverse of that of the deictic type: it is an instruction for the addressee not to look, but to mentally construe the content of the SVI sentence as an appearance, which allows him to process the information as if he were witnessing it. (ibid:92)

It is as a consequence of this affinity between deictic and lexical presentative mechanisms that lexical locative inversion bears a (non-propositional) meaning component that is not present if the same proposition is expressed in canonical word order. If one compares, for instance, the inversion discussed under (2) above to the canonical sentence given in (2b), it becomes evident that the interpretation of the fronted constituent in lexical inversion depends, as is the case with fronted deictic adverbs, on a minimal shared conceptual domain of both speaker **and** addressee:

(2) *In front of the house is a tree.*
(2b) *The tree is in front of the house.*

In (2b), the predication made about the tree is entirely independent of the position or **vantage point** of the speaker as viewer, which lies outside the actual universe of discourse. As a consequence, though the tree is located in the viewer's line of sight, it remains unclear whether the side where the tree stands is the front or the back side of the house. Lexical locative inversion as in (2), by contrast, initiates a presentative mechanism which starts out from an endophoric link to a prior discourse model, even though the link need not be overtly evoked. Since this link belongs to the discourse model conceptually shared by both speaker and addressee, the inversion does not create the same ambiguity as does (2b); instead, the vantage point is the location of the house,

and the location of the tree defined **in relation to** it. It is in this sense that I take lexical locative inversion as carrying a meaning of **perspective** or **point of view**.

This viewpoint analysis of lexical inversion can be substantiated by a range of observations which come from previous studies of the inversion phenomenon. For instance, the question of viewpoint is closely related to Kuno's (1987) theory of empathy, for which he uses his metaphor of "camera angle" (ibid:203ff.). (4a) and (4b) illustrate that inversion affects this phenomenon of empathy or -- metaphorically speaking -- the position of a camera; the change in viewpoint could be described as a camera movement:

(4a) *Into the room sneaked a boy and was immediately hit on the head by me.*
(4b) ??*A boy sneaked into the room and was immediately hit on the head by me.* [= Kuno 1987:(8.5b)]

(4a) is more acceptable than (4b) because, in (4b), Kuno's *Speech Act Empathy Hierachy* (ibid:212), i.e. the strong tendency of the speaker to empathise with himself, and his *Topic Empathy Hierarchy* contradict. With inversion as in (4a), this example is more acceptable, speaker empathy is probably more likely, as if the speaker had moved his camera closer. The same goes for so-called "split intransitivity" observations about inversions, discussed, for instance, in Bresnan (1994:78), where she puts forward a condition that directional PPs require a dynamic verb. Thus, (5a) is acceptable in contrast to (5b):

(5a) *Toward me lurched a drunk.* [= Bresnan 1994 (16a)]
(5b) **Toward me looked a drunk.* [= ibid: (16b)]

In terms of the viewpoint analysis brought forward here, what makes inversion acceptable in (5a) is the fact that the movement of the discourse entity can be one performed in relation to the speaker. *Lurching* is an event which the speaker can perceive as a participant on the scene, while simple *looking*, as in (5b), seemingly is not.

Finally, an analysis of inversion in terms of the speaker adopting a particular viewpoint also helps to clarify the conditions under which it can occur in embedded clauses. Inversion as dealt with here has often been called a *main clause phenomenon* (Green 1976), or a *root transformation* (Emonds 1969); however, inverted word order is not at all totally excluded from the formal environment of an embedded clause. This is illustrated by the list of examples given in (6) to (9):

(6a) *John says that standing in the corner is a man with a camera, and I think he's right.* [= Green 1976: (34a)]
(6b) * *John says that standing in the corner is a man with a camera, and he's wrong.* [= Green 1976: (34c)]
(7) *He has forgotten that over the fireplace hangs a picture of his late wife.* [= Birner 1992: (8)]
(8a) *We can support the claim that standing in the corner was a black umbrella.* [= Green 1976: (56b)]
(8b) ?? *He supports the claim that standing in the corner was a black umbrella.*
(9a) *Something must have happened because in came my father.*
(9b) * *I had to hide the book because in came my father.*

In point of view theory (Reinhart 1983, Ehrlich 1990), sentences with embedded-*that* clauses are said to have two possible readings: one in which the **speaker's** point of view is represented and one in which the **subject's** point of view is represented (Reinhart 1983:170). This potential ambiguity is generally solved by the context and verb meaning. As the examples above show, inversion is acceptable only in those contexts where the embedded clause reflects the speaker's point of view: for instance, only in (6a) are the subject's point of view and the speaker's point of view overtly indicated as compatible. That the necessary condition is not one of asserted as opposed to presupposed material is illustrated by (7): here the inversion occurs in the complement clause of a factive verb and is therefore clearly presupposed. What seems to be important is that the context allows for the speaker making the predication in the embedded clause, i.e. that he or she does not project the predication to the subject's perspective only, but overtly presents it from his or her own point of view. In (7), the

subject's perspective is blocked due to the semantics of *forget*, yet the speaker can nonetheless make the predication from his or her own point of view. Similar conditions account for inversion being acceptable after **first** person factives in contrast to third person factives, and in causal adverbial clauses only if these represent an **external** reason. (8a) is therefore acceptable as opposed to (8b), and (9a) as opposed to (9b); in both cases, the embedding does not serve to project the viewpoint away from the speaker, and the predication remains compatible with the perspective of the speaker him- or herself.

This was intended to illustrate that full inversion is a device by means of which the speaker adopts the vantage point of the fronted constituent, or, more precisely, of the reference point or discourse entity contained in it. What is important is that with these kinds of inversion, there is generally no overt reference to the speaker him- or herself. Lexical locative inversion starts out from a discourse entity previously mentioned or evoked, and thus expresses a viewpoint from **within** the universe of discourse. It will be shown in the following that this is a necessary precondition either for adding an effect of eyewitness perspective to the description of scenes under conditions of displacement, or for leading over to more direct interventions on the part of the speaker into his or her own discourse organisation.

3. Discourse organisation under conditions of displacement

Displacement as a property of human language has been defined as the capacity of language -- or, in Chafe's (1992) terms, of the consciousness of language producers (and receivers) -- to "alternate its focus between experience that is immediate and experience that is displaced" (ibid:231). The author of a discourse is first of all the *proximal* consciousness of speech and operates in the immediacy of the speech situation, while

the person who has experienced certain events at another location or time and now reproduces them via language, has a *displaced* consciousness of his or her own. Displaced matters encoded into language have the nature of *events*, while what takes place in the immediacy of a situation is immediate *experience*. If an author of a discourse focuses not only on displaced matters, but also on the other, displaced consciousness, the events are presented in a way similar to experience. It is this effect which Chafe (ibid:234) labels *displaced immediacy*.

Whether such an effect of displaced immediacy is intended or not also turns out to be relevant for occurrence of full inversion. Considering, for example, news reporting as informative discourse, which I have elsewhere investigated for the usage of inversion (Dorgeloh forthc.), the journalist writing is here the (proximal) consciousness present in a text. In ordinary news reporting, he or she most of the time focuses on displaced matters as mere events. This means that normal conditions of displacement in informative discourse are that the text focuses on displaced events and that these have lost the nature of experience. Under such conditions, full inversions are not -- or only very rarely -- found.

Nonetheless, some kinds of news reports, especially those marked as eyewitness reports by certain papers, contain a perspective which maintains some of the characteristics of immediate experience, and inversion expressing a viewpoint from within the discourse world is one device serving this end. Inversion can therefore be said to contribute to the production of what was above called displaced immediacy, which arises if the author not only focuses on displaced events, but also "on another, distal consciousness" (ibid:235). Informative texts thereby gain something like an eyewitness perspective, or assume this perspective at least temporarily. Such passages are in fact often introduced by an inversion. An example is given in (10):

(10) *Gleaming in the winter sunshine, Bosnian serb guns strung out along this ramshackle hilltop village point menacingly towards Sarajevo's western suburbs, three days after the expiry of Nato's ultimatum for heavy weaponry to be withdrawn or put under United Nations Control.*
[...]
Beside the Warriors lie piles of razor wire that should by now have enclosed the cannons and mortars. UN patrols trudge along the sludgy Crkvine escarpment, as the Serbs clean and oil their guns.
The impasse is perhaps the most glaring example of the Serb's half-hearted compliance with Nato's demands. (*The Guardian*, 25 February 94, p.5)

That there is more emphasis on details resulting from the immediate experience than would be relevant for a bare news text is already indicated by the descriptive beginning of the article. It is in this context that the inversion in the middle of the passage adds to an effect of displaced immediacy, in which the speaker assumes a viewpoint **within the scene itself**, which is here the viewpoint of *the warriors*. Furthermore, the inversion here also supports the organisation of the article, in that it marks a part of it as an immediate description, realised from the eyewitness perspective. Following is another, analysing sub-part, which is initiated primarily by the overt comment of the speaker (*...is perhaps the most glaring example*). Thus, it is not that inversion exclusively occurs in informative texts which for the entire text aim at producing displaced immediacy. By producing this effect, it may also help to set apart a descriptive (eyewitness) passage and other, for instance evaluating or analysing, sub-parts of a discourse, and thereby supports its internal organisation into functional sub-parts.

But not every inversion in an informative text is meant to produce an effect of displaced immediacy, it can also initiate other, non-informative sub-parts. News also serves purposes other than reproducing a scene, a location, or a sequence of events; for instance, it may also aim at providing some kind of analysis or comment. In such contexts, inverted constructions are more likely to be found which follow more abstract constituents, often giving a new orientation within the topical organisation of the

discourse. The fronted constituents then often contain lexical information that can obviously not stem from an experience of the speaker; therefore, the reader will have to look for another kind of ground he or she is invited to share. The viewpoint is then one from **within the speaker's own discourse organisation**, i.e. from the relations among topics according to which the discourse is structured. Instead of a physically existent, displaced situation, the reader is invited into the mind of the speaker, into how he or she sees, relates and evaluates the facts he is dealing with. The vantage point taken, which is again the one of the front-shifted constituent, no longer comes from the world previously experienced, but reflects relations among discourse entities according to which the speaker organises the discourse. (11) is an example which can be analysed along these lines:

(11) *The newspaper complained that Roger Altman, the deputy treasury secretary, is currently also interim chief of the Resolution Trust Corporation, another nominally independent agency which is examining aspects of Whitewater.*
The Journal also attacked the appointment of Mr Clinton's Oxford and Yale classmate [...].
Mr Ludwig, another Renaissance weekend regular, is in charge of regulating national banks, including those in Arkansas linked to Whitewater.
Behind these complaints lies the tacit suggestion that some Clinton officials are intent on side-tracking or emasculating Mr. Fiske's Whitewater investigation while the democrats in Congress look the other way. (*The Guardian*, 11 February 94, p.4)

Significantly, the inversion occurs in the final paragraph of the news report and thus initiates something like a conclusion, rather than being part of the actual reporting itself. This function is supported by markers of "author's comments" (Jones 1983), such as the demonstrative in extended use (*these*) or the evaluation implied in *tacit suggestion*. The task of the inversion within the organisation of the discourse is that it signals a transition from the main informative body to a more directly speaker-based comment, and at the same time summarises previous sub-topics of the discourse and switches over to a more general, higher-level topic of the entire article.

4. Summary

It has been argued in this paper that inversions are a device of expressing point of view in discourse which, in texts with a primarily informative function -- and I have dealt with these exclusively -- make a contribution to structuring it into separate units. On the one hand, inversions can temporarily add a perspective of immediacy to the description of an actual scene or event, thereby setting apart the reproduction of this scene from other functional parts of a text. Alternatively, when the immediacy produced is one from within the author's own discourse organisation, inversions then contribute to signalling that the author provides topical orientation or an evaluation.

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